

grew there in abundance—rosemary, perhaps, or convolvulus, as some have suggested, though that hardly agrees with its use as a birch—and not from Diocletian's Palace, nor yet, as a yet further etymology would have it, from asphalt.

This was the site chosen by Diocletian for his villa-palace, to which he retired in 305 after his solemn abdication on the great plain just outside his eastern capital of Nicomedia, the year following his triumph in Rome. He compelled his colleague, Maximian Augustus, unwillingly, to follow him in renouncing the Imperial throne. Whether Diocletian had begun the building before he left Rome is uncertain. In any case, the vast structure was created in a very short time; but the master of the Roman world could command the luxury of rapid construction, as the speed with which he had converted Nicomedia, his eastern capital, from an oriental village into a city rivalling Antioch and Alexandria in the glory of its buildings, abundantly proved. At any rate, the great palace at Spalato, which we shall presently describe, was built in haste. Some of the material is evidently taken from older monuments, though it is probable that the majority of the columns of the peristyle were imported straight from the Egyptian quarries.